

# SCHELLING'S POETRY

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F.W.J. Schelling was a prolific poet. Fragments and sketches of poems have survived from every period of his 60-year philosophical career.<sup>1</sup> These poems do not exist apart from or in opposition to his philosophical activity; indeed, at times they are absorbed into the system. His 1850 speech to the Berlin Academy on the origin of language breaks off into a Latin poem<sup>2</sup>, for example, and, as we shall see at length, at the end of 1799 Schelling planned a Dantean epic as the keystone to his philosophy. More obviously, many of his poems recapitulate (and sometimes add to) key themes, concepts and arguments in verse form. Schelling's poetry should therefore be taken seriously.

In this paper, I focus on two poems Schelling penned at the end of 1799, the period of his most intense poetic activity. I attempt to articulate the role Schelling intended these poems to play in his system. Central to this investigation is the compatibility of Schellingian poetic practice with his poetics and, in particular, I engage with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's influential interpretation of this relation in The Literary Absolute. My overall aim is to demonstrate the intrinsic philosophical interest of Schelling's poetic endeavors.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially the fragments collected in Hans Kunz, Schellings Gedichte und dichterische Pläne (Zürich: Juris, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, Werke, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856-61), 10:419-22. On this speech, see further Jere-Paul Surber, 'The Problems of Language in German Idealism: An Historical and Conceptual Overview' in O.K. Wiegand et al (eds.), Phenomenology on Kant, German Idealism, Hermeneutics and Logic (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), 327-8.

## 1. The Poem-to-Come

Throughout his philosophy, Schelling persistently invokes a poem-to-come, a messianic speculative epic. Four passages scattered through his corpus serve to illustrate this. First, the Oldest System Programme of German Idealism from 1796:

I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, which embraces all ideas, is an aesthetic act . . . The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet . . . The philosophy of spirit [thus becomes] an aesthetic philosophy [and likewise] poetry gains a higher dignity; at the end it again becomes what it was at the beginning—teacher of mankind; for there is no philosophy, no history any more, poetry alone will survive all the remaining sciences and arts.<sup>3</sup>

Second, a passage from the conclusion to Schelling's System of Transcendental Idealism, published in 1800:

Now if it is art alone which can succeed in objectifying with absolute validity what the philosopher is able to present in a merely subjective fashion, there is one more conclusion yet to be drawn. Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the

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<sup>3</sup> Attributed to G.W.F. Hegel, Friedrich Hölderlin and F.W.J. Schelling, 'The Oldest System Programme of German Idealism', trans. Andrew Bowie, Appendix to Bowie, Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 130-1. Whether or not Schelling had a hand in the penning of this document, there is agreement that it is representative of his thought at that period. For further discussion, see Xavier Tilliette, L'absolu et la philosophie: Essais sur Schelling (Paris: PUF), 26-43; Devin Zane Shaw, Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art (London: Continuum, 2010), 56-7.

infancy of knowledge, and with it all those [other] sciences it has guided to perfection; we may thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source . . . [But this final task] is a problem whose solution can be looked for only in the future destinies of the world, and in the course of history to come.<sup>4</sup>

Third, a passage from Schelling's discussion of poetry in his Lectures on the Philosophy of Art given between 1802 and 1804:

Science in identity with the universe . . . will be in and for itself already poesy and will resolve itself into poesy. The origin of . . . the speculative epic thus coincides with the perfection of science; just as science originally emerged from poesy, so also is its final and most beautiful destiny to flow back into this ocean.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a passage which is repeated in all three drafts Schelling wrote of his Ages of the World project of 1812-1815:

Perhaps the one is still coming who will sing the greatest heroic poem, grasping in spirit something for which the seers of old were famous: what was, what is, what will be. But this time has not yet come.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Schelling, Werke, 3:629; System of Transcendental Idealism, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: Uo Virginia P, 1978), 232-3.

<sup>5</sup> Schelling, Werke, 667; Philosophy of Art, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1989), 226.

<sup>6</sup> Schelling, Werke, 8:206; The Ages of the World (Third Draft), trans. Jason M. Wirth (Albany: SUNY, 2000), xl.

Common to these works is the eschatological promise of a future poem which will complete philosophy: this poem will be the system as such—rather than the fragments which at present merely prefigure the system. Departing from German Idealist orthodoxy, poetry does not anticipate philosophy as material to be sublated; it is the culmination of philosophy. The poem-to-come will put all other philosophy to shame. What is crucial here is that this motif is constant, no matter how different Schelling's own philosophy looks. It appears in works from 1796 through to 1815—through his Fichtean phase, his hyper-rationalist Identitätssystem and his mystical middle period. The philosophy may be different, the poetic messianism remains the same. In this respect, the poem-to-come correlates closely to the 'new mythology' Schelling frequently proposes. Like the poem-to-come, this renewed mythology is to be a form of discourse that will complete philosophy and, like the poem-to-come, it is also a constant in Schelling's thinking from 1796 through to at least 1815, if not the final lectures on the philosophy of mythology. Indeed, Schelling often mentions them in the same breath<sup>7</sup> and characterizes them in the same way, as absolute exhibitions of the entirety of scientific knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

There are, in sum, four properties of this poem-to-come that are worth noting initially. First, it is always promised in the future: this is its eschatological dimension. Second, it will be a didactic poem: this is because it will need to directly communicate the whole of philosophical knowledge in poetic form. Third, it will be all-encompassing: every single aspect of science will be gathered up and presented in this poem. And finally, following directly from this third point, it will be an adequate Darstellung (presentation or exhibition) of the absolute—absolute in both form and content.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, 'The Oldest System Programme of German Idealism', 130-1, and Schelling, Werke, 665; Philosophy of Art, 224.

<sup>8</sup> On Schelling's conception of mythology at this period, see Daniel Whistler, Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 152-7; Steffen Dietzsch, 'Le problème du mythe chez le jeune Schelling' in Archives de Philosophie 38.3 (1975); Shaw, passim. See also footnote 48.

## 2. Two Poems

The jumping-off point for this essay is the contention that in late 1799 Schelling attempted to write this speculative epic himself. He attempted to put philosophy into verse in order to bring about once and for all the completed, absolute system. In what follows, I consider the above in light of the two poems, Heinz Widerporst's Epicurean Confession of Faith and The Heavenly Image (both written at the end of 1799). They have a long tradition of being associated with each other originating in Plitt's 1869 biography which prints them as accompanying pieces. Tilliette has complained, however, that The Heavenly Image has been 'unjustifiably attached to the burlesque Widerporst'.<sup>9</sup> In what follows, I provide a partial justification of this connection. Details concerning the poems' contexts, contents and form have already been outlined in the Translators' Introduction above. To begin, I repeat the material most pertinent to my argument.

### 2.1 The Model of Dante

During late 1799 under the tutelage of Friedrich Schlegel, Schelling (alongside Caroline Schlegel) began learning Italian by means of a reading Dante's Divine Comedy. It is in the same paragraph of a letter to Schleiermacher that Schlegel speaks of these Italian lessons, The Heavenly Image, and Schelling's ambition to write something 'great':

Schelling is quite full of his poem, and I believe it will be something great. Until now he has only made a study and tries to learn stanzas and terza rima. He will probably choose the latter for the whole thing. I am reading Dante with him and Caroline, and we are already over halfway through: when he gets into something, he goes

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<sup>9</sup> Xavier Tilliette, Schelling: Biographie (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1999), 89.

overboard. I have still seen nothing more than thirteen stanzas which he wrote at Christmas for Caroline (with whom he gets on very well indeed) as an announcement of his work.<sup>10</sup>

Dante was, of course, already a crucial figure in the Romantic pantheon. A.W. Schlegel had been theorizing and translating the Divine Comedy since at least 1791; Dante symbolized, alongside Cervantes and Shakespeare, the possibilities for art in a post-Classical age.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Dante would be central to Schelling's thinking about aesthetics and poetic creation for the next few years. In his Lectures on the Philosophy of Art, given in Jena during the Winter Semester of 1802/3 and then again at the University of Würzburg in the Winter Semester of 1803/4, Schelling gives Dante pride of place. He writes,

[The Divine Comedy] is the most universal representative of modern poesy not as this individual poem . . . but rather [as] the poem of all poems, the poesy of modern poesy itself. This is the reason why I made the Divine Comedy of Dante the object of special presentation and do not subsume it under any other genre, but construe it rather as a genre in and for itself. (5:687; 239)

Moreover, while the rest of Schelling's analysis of art in his Lectures languished unpublished until his death, he ensured that his discussion of Dante was published in 1802 in the Kritische Journal der Philosophie under the title, 'Dante in Relation to Philosophy'. I will return to the

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<sup>10</sup> G.L. Plitt, Aus Schellings Leben in Briefen (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1869), 1:289; partially translated in Robert J. Richards, The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), 160.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Friedrich Schlegel, Athenaeum Fragments, §247 in Lucinde and the Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Uo Minnesota P, 1971), 197.

content of this article later in the essay; for now, my point is merely to highlight the significance of Dante as a poetic role-model for Schelling during the years he himself was writing poetry. More evidence of this is provided by Schelling's translation of the second Canto of the Paradiso sent to A.W. Schlegel for approval in 1803.<sup>12</sup> This translation can be seen as the ultimate fruit of those Italian lessons from late 1799. It is, moreover, significant that Schelling chose Paradiso II as his text, since it is to all intents and purposes a physics lesson: Beatrice explains to Dante the nature of bodies and the orbit of the stars. The choice of this canto thus exemplifies Schelling's fascination with didactic poems that integrate philosophical or scientific teachings into poetic forms.

## 2.2 Fragments of the Poem-to-Come

The letter Schlegel writes to Schleiermacher quoted above speaks not only of The Heavenly Image in the same breath as it does a 'great' poem which Schelling was planning; it specifies The Heavenly Image's role as the 'announcement' of this work. What is more, this proposed 'great' poem that Schelling was so 'full' of in Winter 1799 is almost always identified in Schelling scholarship with the speculative epic which is so frequent a motif in his philosophy of the period. The Heavenly Image announces the speculative epic that will complete philosophy. Nothing survives of this 'great' poem Schelling was so full of in January 1800 other than the 'thirteen stanzas' Schlegel mentions.

Nevertheless, it is also customary to associate Heinz Widerporst with the speculative epic in an even more substantial manner. As we shall see, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy make much of this identification, but Schelling scholars, like Tilliette and Kunz, also assert that

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<sup>12</sup>The accompanying letter is found in F.W.J. Schelling, Briefe und Dokumente, ed. Horst Fuhrmans (Bonn: Bouvier, 1968-75), 2:483; the translation itself is printed in Plitt 1:289-92.

Heinz Widerporst is a sketch or fragment of the speculative epic.<sup>13</sup> Hence, both the poems under consideration relate to the poem-to-come. The Heavenly Image is a preface to it; Heinz Widerporst (supposedly) a ‘sketch or résumé’ of its contents.<sup>14</sup> It is for this reason that the connection between these poems and Schelling’s invocation of a messianic poem requires further investigation.

After Schlegel’s letters of January 1800 nothing of Schelling’s ambitions for a ‘great’ epic are ever mentioned in correspondence again—and while Schelling continued to write poetry in a sustained manner until at least 1802 (and in fits and starts for the rest of his life), nothing of such ambition survives. It seems natural to conclude (although what follows puts such a natural conclusion into question) that when Schelling introduces The Ages of the World with the image of ‘the one [who] is still coming who will sing the greatest heroic poem’ but also goes on to stress that ‘this time has not yet come’, he is referring to his own failure to produce the poem which would complete the system and so perfect philosophy.

### 2.3 Satire and Speculation in Heinz Widerporst

Heinz Widerporst opens with Heinz relating his experience of reading the recent works of the Romantic ‘religious turn’:

When they spoke so defiantly of it, it's true,  
I was taken aback and had to think it through;  
I read, as if I really knew,

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<sup>13</sup> See Tilliette, Schelling: Biographie, 76; Kunz 40. There is little prima facie evidence for this view that I can discern, except the circumstantial fact that at the same time as Heinz Widerporst was composed Schelling was beginning work on his epic and also that Heinz Widerporst contains material which surely would have been present in an all-encompassing didactic poem of Schelling’s.

<sup>14</sup> Kunz 40.



The Speeches and the Fragment too . . .

And I had already immersed my soul

In the intuition of the universal whole. (lines 21-4, 29-30)

However, Heinz continues: instead of following the advice of these writers to 'renounc[e] work and life without God' (line 26), more wine and sausage are in order. He sets himself against 'those high, otherworldly screechings' (line 5). Apotheosis and the emasculatory practices needed to effect it are here rejected (lines 18-20), as is all philosophy which is concerned with the transcendent. The fantastic chimeras of the theologians are 'all poesy's negation', phantoms used to scare humanity into behaving with propriety (lines 57-8). Indeed, Schelling goes on to mock the fashion for ethics and virtue (lines 109-12). On the contrary, Heinz disdains 'all smoke and shimmer', preferring instead thoughts with 'nerves, blood, marrow and flesh' (lines 307-10). Heinz Widerporst is a satire on the religious turn and its concern with revelation, with transcendence, with pre-modern ignorance and a priestly elect. It is an anti-theological poem.

However, it is not only this. It is important to acknowledge that amidst the satire and polemic there is a vein of serious philosophical speculation running through the poem. As Ayrault emphasizes, what begins as an assertion of common sense realism quickly develops into a fully-fledged speculative Naturphilosophie.<sup>15</sup> First, Widerporst sings a 'hymn to matter'<sup>16</sup>, articulating thereby his inclination towards the here-and-now, towards what he can see and feel:

That matter is the only certainty,

It protects and guides everything—large or small,

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<sup>15</sup> Roger Ayrault, La genèse du romantisme allemand (Paris: Aubier, 1969), 3:527-8, 537.

<sup>16</sup> Tilliette, Schelling: Biographie, 76.

Is righteous father to all,  
 It is the element to which all thinking does tend;  
 For all knowledge, the beginning and the end. (lines 68-72)

In Lukács' words, 'Schelling's commitment to materialism here is passionate and perfectly explicit.'<sup>17</sup> Out of this proto-philosophical position emerges a genealogy of the evolution of matter into thought. In line with Schelling's own Naturphilosophie, material potentiates itself (that is, intensifies itself) through various levels of inorganic and organic development until it achieves self-consciousness in human form. It is this section of the poem (freed from the surrounding polemic) that Schelling sought fit to publish in 1800:

In what is living and even what has died  
 [The world- spirit] struggles towards consciousness with active strides;  
 This explains how all things appear,  
 For it swells up and makes them persevere;  
 This force, through which metals sprout,  
 Which forces trees in spring to fill out,  
 Which searches in all depths and heights  
 For what turns out towards the light,  
 Which struggles on and spares no pains  
 But now shoots up to higher domains  
 Stretching out its limbs yet further,  
 Before now shortening them together,  
 Twisting and turning it desperately tries  
 To find the right shape, form and size. (lines 195-209)

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<sup>17</sup> Georg Lukács, The Young Hegel, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin, 1975), 249.

Through an interplay of expansion and restriction, material and ideational realms are formed. Both are immanent expressions of the one basic material force in reality. What is more, this whole process is then repeated on a higher, ideational level as the philosophical re-description of nature's evolution (line 235-49): Heinz Widerporst here becomes self-referential, situating its own description of nature as one stage in nature's self-development.<sup>18</sup>

Heinz continues (and here Schelling goes beyond anything that is contained in his contemporaneous work on Naturphilosophie), the generation of an other-worldly realm of gods and spirits is not a genuine product of this force; it is in fact merely an illusion, a product of human false consciousness. The alienated subject fails to recognize himself as part of nature, instead opposing himself to this apparently hostile non-I. Schelling writes,

The giant-spirit finds itself at last.  
From a deep sleep and a long dream  
He awakes to scarcely recognize how he seems,  
He looks at himself with marvel and pleasure,  
Eyes wide open, he examines and takes measure;  
He would like to quickly with all his senses

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<sup>18</sup> There are also hints of Schellingian Naturphilosophie in The Heavenly Image. The beloved is advised to join ever more intimately with 'creative power' (line 35) which seems in this context to imply some form of natural force 'from which creation and destruction spring' (line 40). And, what is more, as in Heinz Widerporst, the language of nature potentiating itself through levels of organisation until it reaches human self-consciousness is also to be found: '[Man] must o'erleap many rungs and proceed / To covet that from which he's cast adrift, / Attain heaven, fired by thirst for the light / Then descend and unseal eternal night.' (lines 53-6). Adler also finds traces of the Goetheo-Schellingian doctrine of polarity in the text (Jeremy Adler, 'Science, Philosophy and Poetry in the Dialogue between Goethe and Schelling' in Elinor S. Schaffer (ed.), The Third Culture: Literature and Science (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 79-81).

Melt back into nature's expanses,  
 But he has now fallen away  
 And cannot flow back as he did yesterday;  
 Instead, small and enclosed must he stand  
 Alone in his own vast land.  
 Fearful that frightening dreams might foretell  
 The giant plucking up its courage to rebel,  
 And like the first god of the golden age  
 Devouring its own children in a rage.  
 He fails to realize that he and the giant are the same,  
 For he has forgotten his previous names,  
 And torments himself with ghosts of the dead. (lines 217-34)

To torment oneself with ghosts is precisely what Schleiermacher and Novalis end up doing, because they fail to realize that man is nature and not cut off from it. Schelling implicitly points to a residual dualism in their thought which is the chink through which theory is 'theologized' once more. Schelling—for the first time in his oeuvre—provides a materialist genealogy of the genesis of religion: it is a deceitful by-product of nature's potentiation.<sup>19</sup>

There is, to conclude this summary, a noticeable movement that takes place in Heinz Widerporst from Heinz' initial anti-theoretical affirmations of wine, girls and sausages to his later deliberations on the finer points of Naturphilosophie. Heinz' basic stance remains constant: a rejection of any attempt to posit value, meaning or reality out of this world or of this life. Each successive 'confession' in the poem is an assertion of immanence; however,

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<sup>19</sup> This provides an alternative model to that found in the Freiheitsschrift. In the 1809 text, God (as existent, not ground) is a genuine, if ultimate product of nature's self-potentiation. Hence, theologians and philosophers may well misunderstand religion to the extent that they oppose it to nature, but what they misunderstand is no illusion.

each confession is more theoretically-sophisticated than the last. Initially, Heinz is a hedonic realist reveling in women and food (lines 39-45); he is then a materialist: ‘Matter is the only certainty’ (line 68); subsequently, he becomes a dynamist positing a primordial ‘force’ (line 200) that gives rise to all things.<sup>20</sup> Just as nature intensifies and potentiates itself into more complex formations, so too does the poem: the attitude to nature expressed therein becomes more and more complex as the poem proceeds. Like everything that exists, poeticized Naturphilosophie potentiates too.

For the purposes of the present essay, the crucial point is that Heinz Widerporst is not merely a polemic; it is not merely a parody; it also engages in serious and original philosophical speculation. In other words, the philosophical work it does is not merely critical and combative, but also constructive and speculative. This poem is interesting in its own right as a document of Schellingian Naturphilosophie. Ultimately, then, Heinz Widerporst tries to do a number of things at the same time and, in consequences, operates with a number of different discourses—some serious, some less so.

## 2.4 Provisional Conclusions

Two provisional conclusions can be drawn from this reading of Heinz Widerporst and The Heavenly Image together. First, reading The Heavenly Image helps us resist any overhasty identification of Schelling with the protagonist of Heinz Widerporst. At the very same time as Schelling was engaging in anti-Christian polemics with Novalis and Schleiermacher and parodying the traditional, neoplatonic imagery of ascent, he himself was employing these tropes in other poems. We should not rush therefore to label 1799 an atheistic moment in Schelling’s trajectory on the basis of Heinz Widerporst alone. Critique of traditional religious

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<sup>20</sup> And note: not a vitalist for whom the life-force would be in some respect ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ phenomena (hence, transcendence would be re-instantiated).

forms of thought and the appropriation of these forms stand together contemporaneously in Schelling's oeuvre. Second, it is important to emphasize once again that these poems were not an insignificant side-project opposed to Schelling's more serious philosophical endeavors. In these poems, Schelling did philosophical work.

In general, we have found Schelling experimenting with a range of poetic voices and poetic forms in The Heavenly Image and Heinz Widerporst. Why this experimentation is so central to his philosophical project as a whole is the question I answer in the second half of this essay. That is, I am now turning to the relation between Schelling's poetic practice and his philosophy—the relation between the theoretical calls for a speculative epic and the poems Schelling actually ended up writing. In other words, what philosophical work is achieved by writing these poems?

### **3. The System of Transcendental Idealism**

The most obvious place to begin is the philosophical work Schelling was writing contemporaneously with Heinz Widerporst and The Heavenly Image—his System of Transcendental Idealism. This is also an obvious place to begin because of the privileged role aesthetics plays therein: more than in any other of his works, here Schelling emphasizes the role of the poem-to-come in completing the philosophical system. However, I will argue that despite these hopeful signs, the System of Transcendental Idealism, in fact, provides frustratingly little information about Schelling's poetic practice and we must look elsewhere. Indeed, readers of Schelling are often uncomfortable with the anachronistic nature of the System of Transcendental Idealism generally: it seems to hark back to Schelling's earliest

writings as a student of Fichte, rather than directly stating his own mature philosophical position.<sup>21</sup>

The System of Transcendental Idealism accords a privileged place to art as a means of achieving philosophical work that the philosopher herself is unable to. Art completes philosophy, since in art (unlike in any other discourse) thought finally becomes absolutely self-conscious and so transparent to itself. In artistic creation, not only do I know, but I know my knowing; indeed, I know the knowing of my knowing ad infinitum. The System of Transcendental Idealism consists in one attempt after another to capture the I in knowledge, but the narrator finds that making the I completely self-evident is impossible within philosophical discourse. Nevertheless, where philosophy fails, art succeeds. For Schelling in the System of Transcendental Idealism, then, ‘art achieves the impossible’ (3:626; 230). Only in ‘the miracle of art’ (3:625; 230) is the I fully represented: the ‘coming-to-be-reflected of the absolutely nonconscious and non-objective is possible only through an aesthetic act of the imagination.’ (3:351; 13) Schelling concludes, ‘It can be given to art alone to pacify our endless striving, and likewise to resolve the final and uttermost contradiction within us’ (3:614; 222). It is by becoming art, therefore, that philosophy completes itself. Far from being a logical and conceptual activity, the only successful philosophy is one which intuits aesthetically.

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-François Marquet's words are representative: ‘The System des transzendentalen Idealismus is paradoxically the work most known by Schelling, the only one which has succeeded in being installed amidst the classics of philosophy, and yet far from marking a summit or even a resting point in the development of a still juvenile thought, it represents, on the contrary, a moment of transition which only in the following years will find its denouement.’ (Liberté et existence: Étude sur la formation de la philosophie de Schelling (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 174) As Schelling himself later acknowledged, the System of Transcendental Idealism was ‘written under the cloak of Fichtean thinking’ (Schelling, Werke, 10:96). Even if it is the most celebrated of Schelling’s early works, it is also something of an anachronism.

Philosophers are impotent, for they depend on artists: ‘Art constitutes the ideal of science, and where art is, science has yet to attain to’ (3:623; 227). Schelling is quite explicit that this intervention of art is a miracle that the philosopher can never really understand, let alone explain. The philosopher is unable to make sense of how and why the artwork achieves what the philosophical text is unable to, and hence Schelling himself is silent about the determinate properties of the poem-to-come which would complete his own philosophical system. He must merely wait in silence for the miracle of genius to occur and the artist to arrive. This is, in James Dodd’s words, ‘the ultimate irony of transcendental philosophy’: ‘the philosopher is at best a witness’ to the completion of the system.<sup>22</sup> Only after the fact might the philosopher reconstruct how and why the artist achieved what she did. Schelling presents an aesthetic eschatology: the genius will redeem philosophy, thereby ending the history of philosophy. Such eschatological thinking is evident in the apophatic nature of Schelling’s discourse about art: he is saying the unsayable—talking inadequately about the messianic event which thoroughly transcends philosophical understanding.

This, then, is Schelling’s conception of the poem-to-come in the System of Transcendental Idealism. It certainly underlines the importance of poetry to the completion of the philosophical system—and so it does explain very generally why Schelling was interested in art and why he might himself have been drawn to poetic composition. However, there are, I think, two reasons why the System of Transcendental Idealism is insufficient to explain the significance of Schelling’s practice of poetic composition.

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<sup>22</sup> James Dodd, ‘Philosophy and Art in Schelling’s System des transzendentalen Idealismus’ in Review of Metaphysics 52.1 (1998), 80. Anton Braeckman similarly writes (citing Dodd), ‘[The] irony consists in the fact that the System des transzendentalen Idealismus somehow results in its own negation.’ Anton Braeckman, ‘From the Work of Art to Absolute Reason: Schelling’s Journey toward Absolute Idealism’ in Review of Metaphysics 57.3 (2004), 558.



First, the absolute superiority Schelling bestows on the artist over the philosopher is a transitory idea in Schelling's philosophical thinking. By 1802, Schelling was vigorously criticizing his earlier position, arguing instead for the superiority of the philosopher. He writes in his Lectures on the Philosophy of Art, 'The philosopher possesses better vision within the essence of art than does the artist himself. . . Outside philosophy and other than through philosophy, nothing can be known about art in an absolute fashion' (Schelling, Werke, 5:348; The Philosophy of Art, 6).<sup>23</sup> There is no longer any question of artistic form going beyond philosophy, because philosophy has already got there. Yet, while the aesthetics of the System of Transcendental Idealism is ephemeral, Schelling's insistence on a poem-to-come is a constant of his thought from 1796 to 1815. The idea of the poem-to-come is not inextricably bound up with the superiority of artistic genius.

Second, the aesthetics of the System of Transcendental Idealism says nothing of the determinate means by which poems could complete the system. Presumably, not all poems complete philosophy: what, then, differentiates the poem-to-come from other poems? What are its specific properties? Schelling is silent on these points and he has to be. His aesthetics in the System of Transcendental Idealism resembles nothing so much as an anti-aesthetics.

#### **4. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy read Schelling**

We must look elsewhere—and this is precisely what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy do in what is the most celebrated reading of Schelling's poetry. They return to the poems themselves to derive a poetics that makes sense of Schelling's claim that the poem-to-come will complete the system.

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<sup>23</sup> Similar criticisms occur at the beginning of the dialogue Bruno, or On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things (Schelling, Werke, 4:231; English translation: trans. Michael G. Vater (Albany: SUNY, 1984), 132).

#### 4.1 The Parody of the System

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's reading of Schellingian poetry begins with an identification of Heinz Widerporst with the poem-to-come, the absolute Darstellung of knowledge that will complete philosophy. This leads them to make the following inferences:

Between the 'Earliest System-Programme' and The Philosophy of Art, [Heinz Widerporst] constitutes what might be called Schelling's (roundabout) attempt to realise the 'speculative epic' that he regarded as the true fulfilment of philosophy, as its poetic Darstellung. . . [It is] nothing other, therefore, than the 'great heroic poem' whose preparation was mentioned in The Ages of the World. . . And yet, it is something altogether different, since it is a satire . . . and is thus also the mockery or reverse of an epic . . . It is undoubtedly not too much to say that the romantic desire for the speculative poem, for the auto-presentation of the opus philosophicum, could only lead—with reference at least to what was published—to the carnivalesque genre, which seems to contradict its properly philosophical intention. Unless this intention is ultimately confirmed when the carnivalesque turns out to be philosophy's own criticism of the retrospective putting-into-form of a given system.<sup>24</sup>

This passage operates through a series of quasi-dialectic manoeuvres of 'and yet' and 'unless': first it is suggested that A equals B, then that A does not equal B; finally, there is the realization (in a quasi-Hegelian moment) that the very inequality of A and B is their equality. The very fact that Heinz Widerporst is not the same as the promised speculative epic

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<sup>24</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism, trans. Philip Bernard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 79-80 (my emphases).

confirms it precisely as that speculative epic. The philosophical system is both completed and not completed by Schelling's poem; in other words, it is completed in incompleteness.

This needs further unpacking: Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy work from the assumption that Heinz Widerporst is not the sort of thing Schelling seems to have in mind when he speaks of the speculative epic; rather, he seems to think of it as a heroic, soaring poem which will encompass all human knowledge in Dantean terza rima. Heinz Widerporst as a boisterous satire of current trends in the Jena circle, written in popular meter, is very different: it is more interested in satirizing speculative claims than teaching them. Yet, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue it is this very satirical function that enables Heinz Widerporst to play the role of the speculative epic and so complete the philosophical system—and this is because, they argue at length throughout The Literary Absolute, Romantic thought always completes itself through fragmentation and incompleteness. 'Fragmentation constitutes the properly romantic vision of the system' (46): the very undermining of all claims to systematization is the only genuine form of systematicity.

Schelling's poetry completes philosophy by satirizing it. Here is how Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy sum up their view:

The systematic vision of the absolute and the absolute vision of the system face each other, stare at each other, and in a certain sense disfigure each other in the same satire of the work, in what amounts to a double parody of theory . . . in the Work. (80)

That is, Schelling's philosophical system is confronted by its other, a satirical poem—which Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call, for reasons I return to, 'the absolute vision of the system'. In this confrontation between the two, philosophy is dislocated, resulting in a carnival of parody and satire. So, the speculative epic is not a pure distillation of philosophical wisdom, such as The Heavenly Image announces, after all. It turns out to be a mixed-up, satirical

attack on other philosophical positions. Speculation here turns into critique, the epic turns into the satire and didacticism becomes parody.

### 4.3 Reflection

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's interpretation of Heinz Widerporst and, more generally, their reading of Jena Romanticism rely heavily on Walter Benjamin's doctoral dissertation, On the Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism. Romanticism enacts, according to Benjamin, a continual reflection on forms. Thinking is insufficient; one must think about thinking and then think about the thinking of thinking. In Benjamin's words, 'Something that already in itself is form . . . is taken up as content into a new form . . . Thus by "reflection" is understood the transformative activity of reflecting on a form.'<sup>25</sup> The first form becomes the material for a second form and so on—in what Benjamin calls, 'that limitless capacity by which . . . every prior reflection [becomes] the object of a subsequent reflection' (123). The point is therefore to keep 'going meta': to have forms about forms about forms. These new, reflective forms both unfold and dissolve the old forms. That is, on the one hand, to reflect on something is to make clear what was only implicit in it beforehand. It is a way of intensifying knowledge until everything is made fully explicit. On the other hand, however, the new forms dissolve the determinate mode in which knowledge was first presented in the name of a more infinite Darstellung. To reflect on something is to distance oneself from it, making the original position redundant. This is 'a paradoxical venture: through demolition to continue building on the formation' (165).

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<sup>25</sup> Walter Benjamin, The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism, trans. David Lachterman et al in Selected Writings vol. 1 (1913-26), ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 1996), 122.

In the same way, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy consider Heinz Widerporst as ironically reflecting on philosophy. It reflects on current trends (such as the religious turn) in order to satirize them. It is a form about philosophical form and so both reveals the essence of that form while simultaneously dissolving it. It fragments philosophy through reflection. Hence, when Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy write, ‘the systematic vision of the absolute and the absolute vision of the system face each other [and] disfigure each other’ (80), they are using terms lifted straight from Benjamin’s dissertation<sup>26</sup>: the systematic vision of the absolute is the theoretical hope for a system, but the absolute vision of the system is that vision reflected ironically. Such reflection disrupts the very notion of a system, but in so doing, it approaches the absolute.

## 5. Satire and Satura

It is my contention in what follows that the reflective logic Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy attribute to Heinz Widerporst misrepresents Schelling’s position. I show this by first considering a subtle distinction between Romantic and Schellingian uses of the term ‘satire’. This will quickly lead to more fundamental differences illustrative of my contention. This initial section on satire is, therefore, intended as a prologue, describing provisional evidence for Schelling’s distance from philosophies of reflection that I go on to justify in the final sections of the essay.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s reading of Schelling rests on an equivocation on the word ‘satire’. They point out that there is satire ‘in the modern sense of the word’ and satire ‘also in the old sense’ (80). That is, they distinguish between what we understand as satire—a genre intent on ridicule—and the classical sense of the term satura—understood as a mixture

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<sup>26</sup> See, in particular, Benjamin 138.

of different genres, styles or forms. In what follows, I use the terms ‘satire’ and ‘satiric’ in their modern sense, while designate a mixture of genres as ‘satura’ and ‘saturan’. Heinz Widerporst undoubtedly possesses elements which are satiric—it pokes fun at both Schleiermacher and Novalis repeatedly—but it also possesses non-satiric elements, such as the construction of a materialist genealogy of religion. It is this very mixture of satiric and non-satiric elements which makes Heinz Widerporst a satura. The poem mixes different genres; it is therefore saturan.

The concept of mixture is crucial here—and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s work on Romanticism is significant for nothing if not the emphasis they place on this concept in poetics. They write,

Gattung [genre]... the process of generation, or the process of assemblage, obviously supposes interpenetration and confusion. Or in other words, mixture (gattieren means ‘to mix’). It could be said that this is precisely what the romantics envisage as the very essence of literature: the union, in satire (another name for mixture) or in the novel of poetry and philosophy, the confusion of all the genres arbitrarily delimited by ancient poetics, the interpenetration of the ancient and modern etc. (91)

Where my reading of Schelling parts company with Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy is with the precise characterization of this mixing. As I put it above, what is problematic is their equivocation between satire and satura. Having distinguished the two senses, they re-identify them once again: satura are, they claim, necessarily satiric. In other words, mixture necessarily serves a deflationary function. However, it is here, I contend, that Schelling’s position must be different from that of the Jena Romantics: the latter agree that what is

saturan is also satiric, whereas Schelling rejects this conflation.<sup>27</sup> This requires explanation: satire is usually conceived as a poetic genre, whereas satura is a transgeneric category (since it describes the mixing together of different genres). For the Jena Romantics, whenever a work of art mixes genres together (as a form of satura), it is also necessarily satiric (it deflates, fragments and undermines). The Jena Romantics therefore reassert satire as a transgeneric as well as a generic category. Schelling refuses this move, however: the mixing together of genres is not necessarily satiric; he refuses to identify satire as a transgeneric correlate of satura. Mixing does not necessarily have a deflationary purpose.

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy go awry in failing to notice Schelling's subtle resistance to Romanticism on this point. They claim that—as a result of being a mixture of genres—Heinz Widerporst undermines Schelling's philosophical pretensions. Here, mixture is seen to serve a deflationary purpose. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy therefore use the fact that Heinz Widerporst is a satura to prove that its purpose is to satirize philosophy.

What is therefore at issue is the very nature of satura or mixing. Does mixing have a satirical function? Is it necessarily deflationary? Or can its role in poetry be something quite different? For both the Jena Romantics and Schelling, mixing is central to their poetics. However, for the Jena Romantics (and for Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy following them) it is bound up with irony and parody. This is not the case for Schelling. In what follows, I undertake three tasks in order to justify such a claim: first, to demonstrate the importance of mixing for Schelling's poetics; second, to exhibit the two different models of mixing that, on the one hand, the Jena Romantics and, on the other, Schelling subscribe to—hence, showing the irreducible difference that still persists between Schelling and Romanticism, even at this

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<sup>27</sup> Although, as we shall see, he does accept the proposition: what is satiric is also saturan. For Schelling, the satiric is a subset of the saturan.

close proximity; finally, to show how this discussion informs my overall aim of shedding light on Schelling's poetic practice.

## 6. Mixing in Schelling's Poetics

First, therefore, it is a question of demonstrating that mixture stands at the heart of Schelling's poetics.

### 6.1 The Metaphysical Background

In order to understand this, I need to take a step back to the metaphysical foundations of his philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Only then can one understand the role Schelling gives to poetry in his philosophical project.

First and foremost, Schelling around the turn of the century is a rigorous monist: 'All that is is, to the extent that it is, One . . . There is everywhere only One Being, only One true Essence.'<sup>29</sup> There is only one thing to reality, and this one thing is identity. Hence, Schelling's second claim is that reality consists in identity: 'Everything that is, is absolute identity itself' (4:119; 351). Third, while this identity might be one, it still exists in two ways: as essence or as form. In other words, reality is composed of two types of identity, essential identity and formal identity (4:120-1; 353-4). So, reality is in essence identity, but it is also necessary that essence cannot exist without form. So, essence always exists formed—there are no exceptions; there is no such thing as essential identity free from formal identity.

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<sup>28</sup> Material in this section summarises Part Two of Whistler's Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language.

<sup>29</sup> Schelling, Werke, 4:129; Presentation of My System of Philosophy, trans. Michael Vater in Philosophical Forum 32.4 (2001), 359.



Reality is always already determinate. The essence of the absolute does not exhibit anything which is not in turn exhibited by form.

What then of the relation between essence and form? Schelling departs from conventional ways of understanding the relationship between them. For example, he rejects the idea that form represents essence where the logic is that of original and copy. A corollary of representation is correspondence: the extent of the correspondence between form and essence is the criterion by which the success of the representation is to be judged. What is at issue on such a model is therefore how ‘adequately’, ‘fully’ or ‘completely’ form mimics essence. The key presuppositions of the representational paradigm are the pre-existence of essence to form (since form must try to capture what already exists), the superiority of essence to form (since form depends on essence but not vice versa) and the ideal of mimesis (form must become as similar to the pre-existing essence as possible). In consequence, representation is built on failure—the likely failure of form to adequately imitate essence. Form is typically inferior to or a diminution of essence; it certainly never improves upon it.

Schelling rejects this model. Instead, he elucidates an alternative built on the principle that formation is inescapable. In consequence, essence is not prior to form; instead, the opposite is true: essence is completely dependent on form. Reality exists by producing essence through a process of formation (Schelling, Werke, 5:482; Philosophy of Art, 99-100). The major consequence of this model is that there is no pre-existent essence against which all subsequent productions can be measured. Correspondence no longer applies. To talk of a form ‘adequately’, ‘fully’ or ‘completely’ expressing essence is therefore nonsense, for there is no benchmark such forms can adequately, fully or completely represent. All that remains are the different intensities with which essence is produced. The process of potentiation (or the intensification of form) is not a means of returning to a pre-given perfection but is rather an infinitely-increasing production.

In short, whereas representation presupposes the inadequacy of forms, Schellingian philosophy conceives form as always excessive.<sup>30</sup> The produced essence is always more than it was prior to production (for, prior to production, it did not exist). Determination is not a prison which stops us reaching what matters most.

If everything is the same—if Schelling is a monist—how can formal identity give rise to the irreducible multiplicity of everyday life? Schelling insists that form is not singular; there is a plurality of formal identities in existence. What then differentiates these forms? Schelling's answer is classically monist: there is only one substance that comprises all there is; the only differentiating attribute is therefore the degree to which this substance is instantiated. Differentiation occurs through excess and surplus; it is the amount by which forms are excesses which distinguish them.

It is on this basis that Schelling's Potenzlehre is established. The various different intensities with which essential identity is produced can be roughly schematized into three groupings: a preponderance of the subjective intensity, a preponderance of the objective intensity, and 'a perfect quantitative balance of subjectivity and objectivity' (Schelling, Werke, 4:127; Presentation, 358). These three groups are the three different manners in which the absolute is produced, and are designated more technically, 'the three potencies'. What differentiates these potencies is the different extent to which they produce identity. Reality potentiates or affirms itself into more and more intense forms until finally the surplus reaches its maximum (in the third potency). The third potency therefore produces essential identity to the maximum possible extent.

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<sup>30</sup> See Xavier Tilliette, Schelling: Une philosophie en devenir (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 1:260.

In conclusion, the Schellingian metaphysical picture can be summed up as follows: reality consists in the potentiation or intensification of forms for the sake of the production of more absolute identity.

## 6.2 Didactic and Satiric Poems

We need to approach Schelling's poetics with these metaphysical tenets in mind. In this section, I consider Schelling's theory of poetic genres in the Philosophy of Art, before turning to his specific comments about Dante in the following section.

As is customary, Schelling splits poetry into three genres: the lyric, the epic and the dramatic. What is of interest here is his conception of epic poetry. Schelling conceives of an ideal epic which would maximally produce indifference, forming its contents into a relation of perfect identity. He writes,

The characteristic quality of the epic is not simply that action or history is portrayed, but rather than these are portrayed within the identity of absoluteness. Action viewed objectively or as history is essentially pure identity without any contrast between the infinite and the finite . . . Both appear interwoven in a common unity. (Schelling, Werke, 5:646; Philosophy of Art, 212)

Such an epic would be the most potentiated possible poetic genre, approximating to absolute identity.<sup>31</sup>

The epic, like all entities, is composed of potencies. Schelling identifies four sub-genres corresponding to the first two potencies; the third potency which is the most intense is left deliberately nameless. Corresponding to the first potency are satire and didactic poetry,

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<sup>31</sup> For a full discussion, see Peter Szondi, Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 2:283-5.

corresponding to the second potency are the elegy and the idyll. The satire and didactic poem are most pertinent. Didacticism is, as we have seen, a necessary component of Schelling's conception of the speculative epic, for this epic will communicate the entirety of human knowledge. It is no surprise then that Schelling raises the specter of the poem-to-come at this point and identifies it as 'the absolute didactic poem' (5:667; 226) which will always have as its contents 'the All itself, as it is reflected in knowledge' (5:664; 224). We know this already, however; what is crucial to the present enquiry is how such an absolute didactic poem is generated—for a traditional didactic poem is not absolute: for one thing, it excludes all the other sub-genres of the epic from its form. It is a one-sided potentiation and in this respect is a less intense creation than the ideal (total) epic.

Schelling's discussion of Lucretius offers a clue to how this gap between the one-sided and the absolute didactic poem is breached. Lucretius' *De rerum natura* provides one of the most important precedents to Schelling's own poetic project.<sup>32</sup> Schelling describes how Lucretius—with 'such reverence'—conveys the whole of Epicurean thought (5:665; 225); and yet, he continues, this speculative project quickly turns into polemic, for Lucretius moves seamlessly between reverent 'presentation of the Epicurean doctrine' and 'inspired rage . . . against religion and false morality' (5:665; 225). The constructive project mixes with a destructive one, or, to put it more bluntly, didacticism which 'seeks to teach' blurs into satire which seeks 'to chastise' (5:662; 223). And it is precisely because of this mixing, Schelling seems implicitly to contend, that Lucretius achieves a 'genuinely epic' form (5:665; 225). This mixing of the genres of didactic poetry and satire makes Lucretius' poem more absolute. Moreover, such mixture of polemical attacks on 'religion and false morality' and constructive expositions of Epicurean-like doctrine is already extremely reminiscent of Schelling's own

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<sup>32</sup> It was conversations with Goethe about Lucretius that partially motivated Schelling's poetic compositions. See Adler 71-2.

practice in Heinz Widerporst. The discussion of Lucretius thus provides an initial clue to the systematic role of Heinz Widerporst.

By mixing discourses, Lucretius' poem potentiates itself and comes close to being an absolute didactic poem. Hence, Schelling insists that De rerum natura is far superior to Virgil's Aeneid: 'In its own way, the poem of Lucretius comes closer than any other Roman poem, for example, that of Virgil, to [genuine poetic prototypes, like the total epic] and only Lucretius shows us the energy of genuinely epic rhythm.' (5:665; 225) De rerum natura is therefore a prototype for Schelling's own speculative epic, particularly to the extent it mixes poetic forms together impurely. Moreover, this is not merely a case of the intermingling of two epic genres (didactic and satire), for different discursive fields—poetry and philosophy—are also here intermixed. This is key: mixing is not a merely interpoetic imperative; it is an imperative for all discourses (the sciences, the arts and philosophy itself).

A similar logic is at play when Schelling then turns to the satire (in the modern sense) and this time he comes straight out with it, 'The satire . . . constitutes a double genre: the serious and the comical.' (5:668; 226) Satire is doubled in its very definition: it is an essentially mixed genre constituting both humorous parody and serious polemic. And this of course should be no surprise, considering its derivation from *satura*. Satires are necessarily *saturan*, according to Schelling's definition: they are irredeemably tainted from their very origin as mixture, as the coming-together of different poetic forms. Similar blurrings of genre are therefore at work in satire as in De rerum natura. The more absolute a satire, the more it mixes forms up—the more improper it becomes.

### 6.3 On Dante in Relation to Philosophy

At the end of the section devoted to the epic, Schelling turns to an artwork which stands close to it: Dante's Divine Comedy (a genre of poetry in itself). 'The Divine Comedy,' Schelling

begins, 'is so self-enclosed that the theory abstracted from the other genres is totally inadequate for it. It requires its own theory, constitutes its own genre, and is a world unto itself.' (5:686; 239) This is the rationale behind devoting a whole section to this one poem in the Lectures.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, what distinguishes the Divine Comedy is simply the following: 'It is the most indissoluble mixture, the most complete interpenetration of everything.' (5:686-7; 239) The Divine Comedy is exemplary of the mixing we saw at work in Lucretius and the satire. Whereas these sub-epics mix one or two different forms, Dante mixed together all he could get his hands on—and thus composed a genuine *satura*. All poetic genres are to be found in Dante's poem: 'It is not an epic, it is not a didactic poem, it is not a novel in the real sense, is not even a comedy or drama such as Dante himself called it. . . nor is it merely a combination of various parts of each. It is a quite unique and as it were organic fusion of all the elements of these genres.' (5:686; 239)<sup>34</sup> However, as in De rerum natura, it is not merely the mixing of poetic genres that occurs in the Divine Comedy, but the mixing of all kinds of usually distinct discourses: physics, astronomy, philosophy and theology. As Schelling points out, 'To present Dante's philosophy, physics and astronomy purely in and for themselves would only be of minor interest, since his true uniqueness lies solely in the manner of their merging with the poetry.'<sup>35</sup> The forms themselves are not important; it is the manner in which they mix which intensifies the poem toward a presentation of absolute identity.

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<sup>33</sup> And, as has already been mentioned, it was this section and it alone that Schelling thought worthy of publication as a separate article.

<sup>34</sup> See also Schelling, Werke 5:154; On Dante in Relation to Philosophy, trans. Elizabeth Rubenstein and David Simpson, in David Simpson (ed), The Origins of Modern Critical Thought: German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 240.

<sup>35</sup> Schelling Werke 5:156; On Dante in Relation to Philosophy, 242.

What emerges here is a poetic equivalent of ‘the extensity test’ that Iain Hamilton Grant has identified in Schelling’s work. ‘Every philosophical construction,’ Grant states, ‘undergoes the test of the extensity of its concepts.’<sup>36</sup> He continues,

[Philosophy] is ‘the infinite science’, and cannot therefore be ‘conditioned’ by eliminating anything a priori from its remit . . . The infinite science must test itself against the All, which lacks neither nature nor Idea. It is the extensity therefore, the range and capacity of philosophical systems that is being tested . . . [Schelling] challenges systems to reveal what they eliminate. [For example] insofar as philosophy still leaves nature to the sciences, it continues to fail Schelling’s test, and becomes a conditioned, that is, a compromised antiphysics.<sup>37</sup>

Poetry too, according to Schelling’s reading of Dante, cannot be conditioned by anything external, if it wants to be absolute. An absolute poem possesses an infinite range of forms. It engages in absolute mixing.

Schelling considers this imperative to mix together discourses a central one in modernity: ‘For the culture of the contemporary world, however, science, religion and even art itself possess no less universal reference and significance than does history, and the true epic of the modern age would have to consist in the indissoluble mixture of just those elements.’ (Schelling, Werke, 5:686; Schelling, Philosophy of Art, 238) This is ‘the ultimate destiny and calling of [the epic] art’ (5:685; 238)—indeed, it is the culmination of all arts and all sciences. Philosophy (to take the most relevant example) cannot exist in a state of splendid isolation if it wants to present identity as intensely as possible. It must combine itself with natural science, combine itself with poetry and so on—in order, through the interpenetration

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<sup>36</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, Philosophies of Nature after Schelling (London: Continuum, 2006), 194.

<sup>37</sup> Grant 19-21, quoting from Schelling, Werke, 2:56.

of these forms, to attain such absoluteness. And in Schelling's opinion not only have very few ever attempted this procedure, but before him only Dante has pursued it in a thoroughgoing manner. The Divine Comedy is absolutely saturan, and for that reason it is absolute. Dante does not stop at mixing idyllic and didactic forms, nor with mixing dramatic and epic forms; he attempts to mix poetry with philosophy, with astronomy and so on. It is for this reason his poem is 'a genre per se . . . the poem of all poems, the poesy of modern poesy itself' (5:687; 239). Dante's Divine Comedy is therefore the model for a speculative epic, 'an archetype for the whole of modern poetry'.

Moreover, it is for this reason that Schelling's Lectures as a whole end with an invocation of a future total art form in the spirit of Dante's epic. It will be 'the most perfect composition of all the arts, the unification of poesy and music through song, of poesy and painting through dance, both in turn synthesized together' (5:736; 280). Not only does this ideal prefigure the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy point out (99), it also exemplifies the very logic of Schellingian poetics: the more eclectic, the better.

Some provisional conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. First, the orienting concept of 'mixture' sheds light on Schelling's poem-to-come. Not only is it essential that this poem be internally composed of a mixture of forms, it is also indicative of Schelling's system that this very idea of a poem-to-come in itself presupposes the ideal of a mixture of forms: philosophy is completed when it mixes with poetry.<sup>38</sup>

Second, it is now evident how the biographical facts concerning Schelling's reading of Dante illuminate the former's poetic project. Schelling's poetry tries to emulate the very texture of Dantean poetry and does so for very good philosophical reasons—namely, for

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<sup>38</sup> And it is worth repeating that such conclusions were not available from a reading of the System of Transcendental Idealism alone.



reasons of mixing. Hence, Schelling's translation of Paradiso II is not merely an anecdote in the history of ideas, but leads us straight to the heart of Schellingian poetics: compromising epic poetry with physics and astronomy, this Canto provides a prime example of the mixing Schelling craves.

Third, it should now be apparent why reading both Heinz Widerporst and The Heavenly Image together is necessary to give a genuine sense of Schelling's poetic endeavor. Heinz Widerporst may be more philosophically substantive, but the heady mix of poetic forms Schelling experiments with can only be gleaned with the addition of the high, Dantean verse of The Heavenly Image. The fact that Schelling's speculative epic may well have included Heinz Widerporst within it, as well as being prefaced by The Heavenly Image, testifies to the scale of the mixture Schelling was trying to encompass in his poem. It is precisely this range of different forms in Schelling's poetry which bring it closer to being a Darstellung of the absolute and so justify its philosophical significance: exemplifying Schelling as a philosopher of form.

This last point is important, for it suggests, I think, where Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy move too quickly. They conceive Heinz Widerporst as diverging from Schelling's 'official' theory of the speculative epic, because they fail to account for the particular account of mixing at the heart of his poetics. Once this is recognized, Heinz Widerporst in fact exemplifies Schellingian poetics as opposed to satirizing it. Heinz Widerporst may well contain elements of satire in the modern sense, but this does not mean it satirizes Schelling's whole aesthetic project. Rather, these satiric elements contribute to the saturan nature of Schelling's poetry—and it is satura, not satire, which is crucial for the potentiation of form.

## 7. Reflective Mixing

As I have argued, central to Schelling's poetics is the concept of mixing. Hence, in order to get to the heart of the idea of the poem-to-come, my next question concerns the specifics of such mixing. Both Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel conceive of the mixing of discourses as a means of potentiating forms so as to approximate to an absolute presentation. At stake in the determination of a Schellingian concept of mixing is the difference that remains between his philosophy and Romantic thought in 1799. In what follows, I propose two models of mixing. The first, I suggest, is Romantic and derives from Benjamin's account of reflection. The second model is Schellingian.<sup>39</sup>

For the Jena Romantics, reflection generates forms about forms. This process gives rise to the ambiguity or irony at the heart of Romantic logic: reflection absolutizes form—where that means both the intensification and dissolution of all forms. The higher the level of reflection, the more impure and mixed the form will be: forms come to encompass more heterogeneous content. Hence, for example, Dante's Divine Comedy becomes on this model an attempt to reflect on all the traditional genres of poetry, mirroring them but also overcoming them in favor of an absolute formlessness. Just like Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's version of Heinz Widerporst, Dante's Divine Comedy would then be meta-poetry: an ironic dislocation of poetry in the name of the absolute.

There are four presuppositions to this view which require note; each of them is contested by Schelling. First, reflection depends on a movement of representation. It is a process of proliferating representations in which form X is generated from form Y by being

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<sup>39</sup> Whether Benjamin's model provides an accurate account of Jena Romantic thought is disputed; however, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's reliance on this model for their reading of Schelling (if not generally in The Literary Absolute) makes it useful for my purposes. Of course, Benjamin's own thought after his doctoral dissertation can be read as providing a further non-Romantic, non-Schellingian model for mixing and potentiation. A full account therefore would ultimately require four models of mixing: Schelling's, Benjamin's account of the Jena Romantics', the Jena Romantics' actual model and Benjamin's own model.

about form Y. Each reflection is a representation of the previous stage. Second, the Romantics conceive the process of potentiation as a vertical one. It is ‘upwardly striving’ according to Novalis.<sup>40</sup> Reflection moves upwards, transcending old forms in the name of new ones. Each new form is a representation that encompasses all of the forms on the previous level. Third, a further premise runs: the absolute is formless. Poems become more absolute through the annihilation of previous forms. Therefore, absoluteness consists in the divesting of all form—the transcendence of form in the name of infinite indeterminateness. Reflection ‘infinitely elevates itself above everything conditioned’.<sup>41</sup> This is, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy point out, the very model of negative theology (47): the absolute ‘survives the downfall of profane forms’ (Benjamin 171). In consequence, finite forms themselves are seen as ‘necessarily incomplete’ (154) and ‘inescapably insufficient’ (143).

Finally, if potentiation occurs through the ironization of all form, then it is not the traditional epic poem that is the model for absolute poetry for the Romantics, nor is it even Dante’s modern epic; it is, instead, the novel. The novel is the ideal form of poetry for the Jena Romantics because it is full of reflections. It ‘can mirror back every given level of consciousness from a higher standpoint’ (Benjamin 172). Like the Divine Comedy, a novel mixes together different genres. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy thus define it as ‘the genre of the mixture of genres’ (85) and elsewhere write, ‘A novel is made up of no genre, but mixing together all genres it is to be understood as the genre of mixture “itself”—satire’.<sup>42</sup> This mixing is a product of reflection: the novel comments ironically on traditional forms and so dissolves them. While the Divine Comedy includes elements of dramatic poetry, Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister is about drama.

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Benjamin 132.

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, Critical Fragments, §42 (in Firchow 148).

<sup>42</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Le dialogue des genres’ in Poétique 21 (1975), 149.

## 8. Schellingian Mixing

In order to fully grasp the extent that Schelling diverges from this Romantic position, I must take up the metaphysical story once again.<sup>43</sup>

To resume my earlier discussion of Schellingian metaphysics, Schelling is a monist: all there is is identity. This identity is produced to the extent that forms are potentiated—that is, to the extent that forms increasingly exhibit identity. As I already made clear in the previous discussion, this model is premised on the rejection of representation. Indeed, the general name Schelling gives to representational thought is revealingly enough, ‘reflection’. Reflection designates all that is wrong with our habitual mode of thinking, and ultimately this wrongness boils down to the creation of oppositions, including the subject-object opposition. Reflection is to be defined as minimally expressive thought.<sup>44</sup> ‘Reflection dismembers absolute unity.’<sup>45</sup> This is absolutely crucial in light of the Romantic commitment to a logic of reflection. Schelling is thoroughly critical of this tendency: to think of forms representing or reflecting is a failure to understand how the world works.

These metaphysical foundations also show why Schelling opposes the formlessness of the Romantic absolute. There is nothing that is not formed, and this is not a bad thing: Schelling does not consider formation (or determination) a diminution. Instead, formation is productive: it increases, rather than reduces, reality. Hence, absoluteness is not formlessness, but, on the contrary, the most formed or determinate entity. The absolute becomes

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<sup>43</sup> Some of what follows summarises Parts Three and Four of Whistler, Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language.

<sup>44</sup> See Schelling, Werke, 4:298; Bruno, 195.

<sup>45</sup> Schelling, Werke, 4:251; Bruno, 151.

determinate without thereby losing any of its absoluteness. Schelling writes, for example, that an idea ‘receives the entire absolute into itself and even in uttermost particularity it becomes entirely absolute again.’<sup>46</sup> Or, in the realm of aesthetics, ‘the essence of all art’ (Schelling, Werke, 5:639; Philosophy of Art, 237) and ‘the law of beauty’ is the ‘Darstellung of the absolute within limitation without suspension of the absolute’ (5:405; 45).

Moreover, as we have already seen, this process of formation occurs through mixing. It is only through the eclectic accumulation of discursive forms that Schelling thinks forms can be produced absolutely. Returning to Schelling’s metaphysics shows why. There is one essence to reality, and this essence is identity. In consequence, all texts have essentially the same subject matter: identity. All future writing will repeat the same essence over and over. Progress does not therefore consist in what is said, but how it is said. Discursive form becomes what is crucial. The Schellingian ideal is a form which produces essential identity at the maximum possible intensity. This point can be turned reflexively back onto Schelling’s own practice: the Identitätssystem merely repeats the same essence as all other philosophies. It is when it comes to form, Schelling claims, that it is to be set above everything else. This is ultimately the reason why Schelling experiments with dialogue in Bruno and with the more geometrico in the 1801 Presentation; it is the reason why he adopts Spinozist vocabulary in the 1804 System, Platonic vocabulary in Bruno and theological vocabulary in the Philosophy of Art. All these various experiments in form are variations on one fundamental practice which Schelling thinks will make his system the most intense—mixing, the magpie-like appropriation of forms for the sake of producing an absolute system. In other words, all forms produce identity, but some do so better than others; therefore, the task of the thinker is to locate the most productive aspects of each science and assemble them into a system; the

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<sup>46</sup> Schelling, Werke, 4:405; Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy, trans. Michael Vater in Philosophical Forum 32.4 (2001), 392

result is a system of identity, an Identitätssystem. In consequence, impropriety becomes the very ideal of science. An improper science is one unconcerned with borders between fields, but which plunders every science equally in order to intensify its productivity.<sup>47</sup>

Mixing is therefore the very essence of Schellingian philosophical practice. I am arguing, that is, that what we have identified as the mixing of genres and discourses in Schelling's poetry is synonymous with this idea of systematic mixing in his philosophical practice. The system is completed by the appropriation of forms from all discourses, whether philosophical or poetic. Any and all forms are crucial to the potentiation of the system, and this holds good for poetic forms as well. We now can fully understand why the speculative epic was so crucial to Schelling throughout this period: it added another form—or, in fact, another collection of poetic forms from very different genres—to the system. Sitting alongside mathematical forms, Spinozist forms and Platonic forms of discourse, this poetry would help potentiate the system further until it manifests identity to the maximum possible extent.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> On this point, see further Daniel Whistler, 'Improper Names for God: Religious Language and the "Spinoza Effect"' in Speculations 3 (2012).

<sup>48</sup> Hence, I am contending that the idea that poetry completes or perfects philosophy, so prevalent in Schelling's philosophy is not (as it first appears) a call for philosophy to be entirely translated into poetic forms (in a romanticisation or aestheticisation of philosophy), for this would exclude other discursive forms from the absolute system (thus failing the extensity test). Rather, 'poetry' here signifies 'the complete interpenetration of everything', as Schelling says of Dante, a system incorporating all forms. The completed system is to be poetic merely in the way that the Divine Comedy is poetic, as mixture. Similarly, the 'new mythology'—so closely tied to the proposal of a poem-to-come—is also to be labelled a 'mythology' only in the loosest possible sense. It too is an eclectic name for the process of eclectically assembling discursive forms. Mythology and poetry are concepts speculatively transformed in the system to mean something new. See Whistler, Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language, 60-3, 233-6.

We are also now in a position to understand why the mixing that Schelling practices is very different from that practiced amongst the Jena Romantics. First and foremost, Schelling rejects the representational basis of Romantic reflection. The fact that forms may be about other forms is absolutely irrelevant to their intensity, for reality as a whole, including poetic language, does not operate through representation, but through production. It is the productivity of forms, not their reference, which is at stake in Schelling's poetics. In consequence, there is no hierarchy of forms as there is in reflection: each new form does not transcend the previous one by subsuming it. There is no real vertical axis at play here at all; instead, all forms are arranged on the immanent plane of the system. Instead, of a continual, endless process of 'going meta', of constituting ever more encompassing forms, Schelling's theory of mixing describes a process of addition, of endless assemblage, new forms being added to and coalescing with previous forms. Schellingian mixing is not reflective in any way—and we must remember he even gives the name 'reflection' to false thinking. There is no dissolution of form, but merely an increasing complexification of form. Forms collide on an immanent plane; they do not ironically distance themselves from each other. Hence, the novel (which mixes ironically) cannot be Schelling's model. Schelling is not a novel writer; he is a system-builder who composes epic poems.

What we have in the early Schelling, I maintain, is a Naturphilosophie of discursive forms, and likewise his poetics describes a Naturphilosophie of poetic forms: genres, styles and meters coalesce, collide and mix within the speculative epic and this is what makes it absolute. The speculative epic is therefore a crucial part of the process of addition occurring more generally in the system. And this defines the distinctiveness of Schellingian poetics. It is the reason why Schelling himself embarked on the composition of poetry. Philosophy needs to incorporate all poetic forms in order to potentiate its discourse to the maximum extent. The system is absolute only to the extent it passes the extensity test.

## 9. Conclusion

Schelling was embedded in the midst of Romanticism throughout 1799. He studied Dante under Friedrich Schlegel, wrote satires in the spirit of symphilosophy and dedicated verses to Caroline Schlegel. What is more, the poetics that he developed at this period appears extremely close to the poetics of the Jena Romantics: there is a form of absolute poetry achieved through the mixing of all genres. Yet, despite this close proximity, Schellingian poetics are irreducible to Romantic poetics.<sup>49</sup> And this is because Schelling's concept of mixing remains his own; it is a concept that remains tied to his rejection of representation, his refutation of the idea of a formless absolute and his refusal to countenance the power of reflection. Schelling's concept of mixing is, instead, developed out of his meta-philosophical praxis and his account of systematicity: the endless assemblage of discursive forms in the name of identity. We have seen this process of potentiation-through-assemblage not just within Heinz Widerporst in which Heinz' increasingly-developed confessions of Naturphilosophie are mixed in with a polemical satire against Schleiermacher and Novalis; we have seen it not only within Schelling's poetry as a whole, which—as fragments contributing to an unwritten speculative epic—mix the low Knittelvers of Heinz Widerporst with the high, Dantean terza rima of The Heavenly Image; but we have also seen this process of potentiation-through-assemblage take place on the level of the system as such, which mixes discursive forms, including philosophy and poetry, as a means to absoluteness.

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<sup>49</sup> For more on Schelling's difference from the Romantics in 1799 (focusing on productivity in the First Outline), see Dalia Nassar, 'Schelling und die Frühromantik: Das Unendliche und das Endliche im Kunstwerk' in Mildred Galland-Szymkowiak (ed.), Das Problem der Endlichkeit in der Philosophie Schellings (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2011).



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